

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: MARCH 16 DEMONSTRATION HALTED BY POLICE WITHOUT SERIOUS INCIDENT

REF: BRUSSELS 02239

SUMMARY: FLEMISH NATIONALIST DEMONSTRATION OVER LINGUISTIC ISSUE IN BRUSSELS WAS CONTAINED WITHOUT SERIOUS INCIDENT OUTSIDE BRUSSELS AREA BY EFFECTIVE POLICE INTERVENTION MARCH 16. NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATORS NOT MORE THAN 3,500, FELL FAR SHORT OF 15,000 ORGANIZERS HAD HOPED FOR. MAJOR FLEMISH PARTIES REFUSED TO SUPPORT DEMONSTRATION LEAVING ONLY FLEMISH NATIONALIST VOLKSUNIE WITH SPONSORING PARA-MILITARY GROUPS. GENERALLY RECOGNIZED FAILURE OF DEMONSTRATION SHOULD COOL OFF LINGUISTIC ISSUE IN PARLIAMENT AND ALLOW GOVERNMENT TO PURSUE SOLUTION THROUGH LEGAL CHANNELS. END SUMMARY

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. 2,000 - 3,000 FLEMISH NATIONALISTS HEADED BY MEMBERS OF THE VOLKSUNIE PARTY AND FLEMISH PARA-MILITARY GROUP TALL AKTIE KOMITTEE (TAK) ASSEMBLED OUTSIDE BRUSSELS MARCH 16 IN ATTEMPT MARCH TO TOWN HALL, (MAISON COMMUNAL) IN SCHAERBEEK IN DEFIANCE OF ORDINANCE

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FORBIDDING DEMONSTRATIONS BY UNIFORMED GROUPS IN THAT COMMUNE.

TWO THOUSAND GENDARMERIE WERE ON HAND TO ENFORCE THE LAW. TOWN HALL WAS COMPLETELY BLOCKED OFF AND NO ACCESS PERMITTED WITHIN ONE BLOCK. MINOR SYMBOLIC DEMONSTRATION (ABOUT 200 PEOPLE) OCCURRED EARLY MARCH 16 NEAR TOWN HALL HEADED BY A VOLKSUNIE DEPUTY FROM BRUSSELS (ANCIAUX). DEMONSTRATORS MADE NO ATTEMPT PASS BARRICADES AND DEPARTED PEACABLY TO JOIN BULK OF PARTICIPANTS IN A FLEMISH SUBURB OUTSIDE BRUSSELS.

2. MAIN TEST OF WILLS OCCURRED AT MIDDAY WHEN APPROXIMATELY 1,500 DEMONSTRATORS ATTEMPTED MARCH INTO BRUSSELS GENDARMERIE, BACKED BY MOBILE WATER CANNON, CAVALRY AND APCs BLOCKED THE WAY. AFTER BRIEF SCUFFLE WHICH RESULTED IN FEW SLIGHT INJURIES, FACE-SAVING GESTURE WAS ARRANGED IN WHICH GENDARMERIE RETREATED JUST INSIDE PERIMETER OF SCHAERBEEK. THIS ALLOWED DEMONSTRATORS TO SET FOOT ON COMMUNAL TERRITORY AND CLAIM THEY DEMONSTRATED IN SCHAERBEEK MARCH 16. DEMONSTRATORS THEN DISPERSED WITHOUT FURTHER SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT.

3. PREVIOUSLY NUMBER OF FLEMISH MILITANTS INFILTRATED INTO SCHAERBEEK AND BROUGHT ABOUT SCUFFLES WITH MEMBERS OF FRANCOPHONE NATIONALIST GROUP (BELIED) NEAR TOWN HALL. BETWEEN 50 AND 100 WOULD BE RIOTERS WERE BRIEFLY DETAINED BY POLICE, WHO MADE RESTRAINED USE OF MASSIVE FORCE MOBILIZED FOR THE DAY.
END UNCLASSIFIED

4. COMMENT: ACTUAL NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATORS FELL FAR SHORT OF 15,000 WHICH FLEMISH MILITANTS HAD ANNOUNCED BEFOREHAND. DEMONSTRATION IS VIEWED AS FAILURE BY A RELIEVED GOVERNMENT AND MOST OF PRESS. FLEMISH NATIONALISTS WILL CLAIM PARTIAL VICTORY IN THAT THEY MOBILIZED HARD CORE IN FACE OF STRONG POLICE ACTION AND STIRRED NATIONWIDE ATTENTION AND CONCERN. IN FACT THEIR FAILURE TO ROUSE NATION TO ANYTHING LIKE PASSIONATE ENGAGEMENT MEANS TINDEMANS' TACTIC OF SHUNTING LINGUISTIC ISSUE INTO SLOW-MOVING LEGAL CHANNEL HAS SUCCEEDED AND DANGER OF POLITICAL CRISIS BEING CREATED BY LANGUAGE FANATICS THIS SPRING IS PAST. FIRESTONE

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